

THE TRUE FAITH.

A Sermon Delivered at St. Clement's Church, Philadelphia, by Rev. W. H. N. Stewart, LL.D., on Sunday Evening, May 7, 1871.

"The faith which was once delivered to the saints."—St. Jude, 3d verse.

It is a great pity that people are not more impartial. It is possible that judicial fairness is a cold frame of mind, and orators and declaimers seek to excite an impassioned state of feeling in which men will fuse and take a shape and be moulded into partisans, often without care or capacity to understand the points thoroughly to the defense of which they are once committed. This will be found to be true in most disagreements in religion. It is particularly true in the controversy between what is called Protestantism and Catholicism. These terms are difficult to be defined with precision, and are by no means contradictory of one another. Protestantism, at least in its original condition, was opposed to Romanism or Popery and not to Catholicism. Now, by Catholicism I understand that system of doctrine, or aggregate of beliefs and practices which are retained by the Greek, the Italian or Latin, and the Anglican Churches in common, after discounting from each of them the peculiarities it has retained; and by Protestantism I mean every phase of belief or unbelief, from the Waldenses to Theodore Parker, which agrees in protesting against Roman errors or additions to the faith. That aspect of the different societies "in which Catholics they do not test too much," does not save them individually from error; and if Rome be corrupt, the Protestant sects, on matters concerning the faith, which was once delivered to the saints, are in a hopeless muddle. I say this on my responsibility as a theologian, from a thorough conviction, founded on investigation, that if the Greek and English Church were out of the way, the sects of Protestant Christians would be virtually at the mercy of their great opponent, the Roman Church, without a Bible and without an agreement, and without capacity to cohere.

Very few men understand their own faith, or the true methods of defending their own positions and doctrines. Still fewer have any just conception of their antagonist's system. No more painful or absurd scene can be witnessed than that of two theological disputants, each one imputing to the other principles he does not hold, or logically convincing each other of holding opinions which each reciprocally repudiates. Thus, on several occasions in my younger days, I have been deluged by Protestants declaimers with irrefragable confutations of Roman opinions and practices, but at last to awake to the conviction that Romanists did not always hold their doctrines in the terms or on the grounds that Protestant orators assigned them. Instead, then, of inquiries into points of difference, which provoke temper and raise illusive clouds of argument, it is more rational and Christian to inquire into points on which there is substantial agreement, and see by what possible or extorted concessions on either side both could concur in a joint statement of substantial truth. If that were done men would not long be separated by needless divisions, but would abate them as long as Satan is prince of this world, brethren, so long the truth of God passeth in the world for a stranger, and being among strangers, easily findeth an enemy and is ill-treated. "This only thing truth desireth, that no man condemn her before he know her." (Veritas seipsum persequitur, etc. Tertul. in Apol., D. C. 1.)

As an example of the haste and injustice with which judgments are formed, we may recall the statements made respecting St. John the Baptist and our blessed Lord Himself recorded in the Scriptures. St. John, rebuking sin, preaching repentance, and hearing confessions, offended the Jews by his simplicity, abstinence, roughness of speech, and love of solitude, and was said to be possessed with the devil. While our Lord who went to the feast at Cana and ate and drank in the houses where he was invited was thought to be a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber and a "friend of sinners," which indeed they both were, you know, but in a way their enemies did not wish to acknowledge.

We know from Scripture and history that equally unjust, capricious, and even flagrantly blasphemous opinions have prevailed against the doctrines of Christ and against earnest men, like the Baptist, who make them a reality. When their good life, or their reformed life, cannot be denied, or their work has become a success, as St. John's was when the region round about went out to him "repenting and confessing their sins," then the old heathen method is revived. The friendly Herod of the day, who hears the preachers gladly, but cannot bear personal reproach, and desires to shut up the preachers in prison, but fears the people who count them as prophets, is at last urged on, in spite of his own regret, to cut off St. John's head, and for the sake of his consistency in a bad promise and false human respect for those with him, he gives it to the women of his family who had been waiting, if not plotting to receive it long before. And thus the world often triumphs over the Church, private spite over public principle, and the concubine, Herodias, has power to destroy; and her daughter, Salome, is exultant, while the Bride of Christ herself—the Church—is outraged, and her sons and her daughters denied a place or a voice in the household.

Both the hostile and the friendly being in more or less of a muddle respecting the truth, some say, "This is a good man," others say, "Nay, but he deceiveth the people, and his greatest enemies, who are nothing if they are not 'Episcopians,' say honestly that he is not only in a 'wing of the castle,' but in the very citadel," defending the literal truth of the Prayer Book, and that he has a right to be there, and this avowal is made with the distinct admission that it is not the destruction of the man they crave, but the overthrow of the citadel itself, the Prayer Book he defends and stands protected by. Our Lord, when accused of demonism, said, with simplicity and dignity, "I have not a devil, but I honor my Father and ye do dishonor Me," and when they insinuated the charge that the Baptist was the Christ he simply disavowed all power but that of a Voice, and a Messenger, or Ambassador for Christ, preaching repentance and proclaiming remission of sins, confessions of which he heard. It was such misrepresentations as these that in later days led apologists for Christianity to write their explanations and set up a defense of the faith once delivered to the saints. Eminent men like Bishops Jewell and Bull, are spoken of and claimed by rhetorical declaimers as defenders of doctrines they deny. The declaimers are men whom I know to be without fairness in argument, honesty in quotation, or theological understandings sufficient to enable them to understand what they say or whereof they affirm. Bishop Bull, in his famous vindication of the Church of England, p. 210, says, "The Church has retained some

ceremonies that had on them the stamp of venerable antiquity, or which recommended themselves by their fitness. The Reformers did not pull down the old structures, and raise new ones; no, nor so much as newly consecrate the old; but they removed the objects and occasions of idolatrous worship, leaving the other things as they found them, and freely and without scruple making use of them." Calvin, who was not a priest, made what he called a Church without one, and in his "Institutes" directs unquiet consciences to go to their self-constituted pastors. And the Puritans repudiated or reformed Calvin. They razed the altars, discredited the orders of the ministry, superseded the sacramental faith-only system of the results of which Luther himself warmly disapproved. They converted the priests of God into preachers who went out before they were sent, and could not tell by what authority they taught the things they did teach. And so, by a process of attenuation and minimization of the Catholic usages of primitive antiquity, they assimilated themselves to those who never had any authority except an authority like Korah and his company in the Church of God.

The puritan in heart, inside and outside the Church, still denounces that as Romanish which has always been held in the church catholic, and in every part of it, and this church is the only bulwark from behind which the puritan can point his guns, and they are all antique and warlike artillery which will not bear to be discharged, and which are more fatal to those in the line of their breach than to those in the line of their muzzle. The fundamental truths of religion are acknowledged to be contained in the creeds of the Church, and were at first believed as they are now, because the Church taught them before any New Testament was written. And Bishop Bull says:—"The Church does not deliver the articles of religion as essentials of faith, but simply as a body of pious principles for the preservation of peace, to be subscribed and not openly contradicted by the clergy." The laity are not obliged to subscribe them, and Archbishop Usher says, "We do not oblige any man to believe, but only not to contradict them." And Bishop Hall, in his Catholic propositions, says:—"The points of faith are contained in the canonical Scriptures and in the ancient creeds, received and allowed by the whole Church. There are and may be many theological points which are wont to be believed and maintained by one or that particular church, or the Doctor thereof or their followers, as godly and profitable truths, but sides those essential and main matters of faith, without any prejudice at all to the common peace of the Church. But it is not lawful for the same persons to impose or intrude the same doctrines upon any Church or person as of necessity to salvation, or to eject out of the Church any person or company of men that think otherwise."—Vindication, p. 213.

I may now enumerate briefly, with a few comments, some of the points on which our branch of the Catholic Church differs from the Church of Rome, and you may rely on my statements as judicially impartial, no dishonesty being in my mind more odious than that which underates or overstates the expressions of an opponent. I do this for the information of the unwary, as well as for the confutation of ill-informed Protestant and Popish talkers, who know not what they say or whereof they affirm, and I fear they do not care for anything but momentary partisan success.

First, then, we reject the supremacy of the Pope. We are willing to concede to him a primacy, as a patriarch, or presiding bishop of the Latin Church, but we deny his supremacy in the Catholic Church, because all bishops are equal, and no bishop can be supreme over his brethren. We are willing to grant that the Pope, in a general council of his province, may come to right decisions on faith and usage, but we deny that he is infallible. This simple denial is a corrective of all erroneous additions to the faith once delivered to the saints, which additions were made by Papal authority or insinuation. The Roman Church has of late been forced to lay aside her temporal power. The English Church is now voluntarily adherent to temporal privileges of endowments and State support, which the Church of Ireland has been violently despoiled of; so that the Presbyterian Establishment in Scotland and the English Established Church are the only two organizations allied to the State by pecuniary and privileged ties, and trying their strength with lamentable non-success to serve two masters. I believe the English Church will soon be severed from the State; and I hope it may be somewhat impoverished and the process, or at least have its now unjustly allotted endowments redistributed in a fairer and more equitable way.

Thus in the matter of temporalities the various branches of the Church are drawing together again, rejecting human treaties with States and Kings, and preparing for reunion in dependence upon the Divine support of Christ without any State aid, when the time shall come to reunite.

In regard to the doctrine of justification by faith, the best divines do not think the doctrine of the Council of Trent so far from the truth, or the Lutheran doctrine so near it, as that an honest mind could not strike a man which would obviate grave objections on both sides, and unite the opposing parties. Our articles on justification are so cautiously expressed that a Roman Catholic could, I think, sign them freely. But Methodism brought in the Lutheran doctrine in a flood. It is of this doctrine, which Luther claims to have discovered, that Luther himself thus writes, "If God had not shut my eyes to consequences, if I had foreseen the scandal I should create, I would certainly never have ventured to propagate my doctrine."—Ed. Waloh. vi. 920.

In the matter of transubstantiation—the assertion of a real [objective] presence is no longer thought by intelligent theologians or earnest Christians to imply any physical or carnal presence, but a sacramental, spiritual, mystical, and real presence. For, on a calm inquiry into the word 'substance' it appears that Rome and England mean different things by it. Substantia is the substratum or underlying something in which all qualities of bodies inhere—where grain in the field, flour in the mill, bread in the oven have qualities which vary, change, and disappear at each change, but the substance remains the same—that underlying thing by which we are nourished. But though the substance be unaltered while the sensible qualities are changed, you can reverse this order, and imagine the substance to be altered, and the qualities which strike the sense to be still unchanged. This is transubstantiation. The substance alters, the qualities remain the same. Now the English Church says the qualities of the bread and wine remain sensibly the same, but that a change does, by the consecration of the priest, take place (for God blesses His work) somewhere in the bread and wine.

But where is this change located? The

English Church does not locate it anywhere. The Roman Church does, and that is the amount of the difference between them on transubstantiation; and when men cease their wrangles they will see substantial unity on that point now exists. To say with the Romanists that the change is in the substance, is to say with the true Catholic that the change is not visible, is inward, is not in the sensible qualities, but that while the sense perceives one thing, faith receives another. Neither Romanist nor true Catholic pretend to worship or adore any material thing. Again, the great Roman writer, Dr. Mosheim, Symb. p. 203, says the confession of Augsburg, a Protestant document, expresses itself in a manner to enable Romanists to declare themselves tolerably at ease with it, and a subsequent "apology" for it was still more explicitly satisfactory. In the course of time no important differences, inherent in the nature of things, could be pointed out between the parties. But as a dispute had once existed in Germany between Roman Catholics and Protestants, from which the original Protestants had retreated, then the latter would not acknowledge the mistakes of the earlier Protestants, and to keep up a separation had to invent other differences. Thus, Marheineke says the difference between Protestants and Romanists is this—Romanists say the sacraments contain grace, and Protestants say the sacraments confer it, but the Romanist will use both phrases; so that this alleged fundamental difference vanishes before the critical statement of it; not by the Protestants accepting the Roman view, but by Romanists acquiescing in the Lutheran-German-Protestant doctrine.

With Puritans all grades in the ministry, and especially Episcopacy, or government by bishops, is in fact prelacy, if not actually Popery. Now the recognition of the authority and jurisdiction of diocesan bishops over their own flock, according to law and in conformity with standards, is the most effective barrier, and strongest protest against the arbitrary rule of any one bishop, or any attempt at domination over others. The equality of States prevents the usurpation of authority by any one State over the others, and in like manner the usurpation by any one bishop, and the law which protects those under him, render his attempts to rule at will, instead of according to law, nugatory. So that if a Bishop were to order what is not, or forbid what is, in the Prayer Book, or deny it to be there when its accredited expositors (such as Wheatly and fifteen other writers and thirty-six bishops) have found it and expounded it therein, then that single bishop's judgment, however strongly expressed, may be disregarded with perfect respect for him and his office, until he can get the House of Bishops and the whole Church to join him in altering the words of the Prayer Book which he ignores, and which it is the radical purpose of a persistent party to change. I, for my part, do not think that a bishop who is a mere rhetorician, and without accurate theological knowledge, can induce any respectable number of priests or bishops to believe that God has given him power and commandment to His people, when penitent, the abolition and remission of their sins. This is part of the power and commandment transmitted from Apostolic days in what is called the apostolical succession. I remember the time when men cast down their eyes in modest deprecation of "apostolical succession" as a thing, you know, which only very imprudent extreme men acknowledged themselves to hold, and always apologized to their dissenting brethren for holding even in a timid way. But I believe it is no beginning to be regarded as a thing which nobody can deny; and I have heard that Presbyterians are looking up their titles, and trying to clear the flaws in their records and exhibits of them that they may claim a Presbyterian succession; and I suppose it may go on until we have Quaker preachers, who intone their sermons with acceptance, and prove their lineal descent from Fox through Penn, with a pneumatic but not factual junction with Bunyan and the "Pilgrim's Progress." I know from Methodist friends in England that the young people there are not exercised about the validity of the orders Mr. Wesley is supposed to have given the Methodists there or here; and the feeling that, if they have sound doctrine, they at least have no priest's sacraments, is driving their most studious young men into the Anglican Church. The power of remitting sin (ministerially) was undoubtedly given by Christ to men. There must be some sense in which it is still true that the power of remitting sin exists on earth still. This power is exercised before men's eyes by men who are priests, in baptism, absolution, and in the Holy Eucharist. In baptism it is a whole and full remission," says Bishop Jewell, and St. Paul says, "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus," to them "who by baptism have put on Christ."—Def. p. 219.

In holy communion prayer is made for the remission of our sins and all other benefits of Christ's passion. But in both baptism and communion the absolution or remission secured proceeds upon the previous renunciation of sin and confession of it, which the parties make in the ear of the priest, who exacts the promises of renunciation, faith, and obedience, and dictates to penitents the very words of confession in the public service before they are absolved. But sinners are penitent at other times than at baptism or communion, and need the comfortable assurance and declaration. The desire to confess, the determination to be honest and thorough, and no longer a sham and a lie to others, requires, demands, craves the opportunity. It is a need of nature, not at all times, nor habitually, but sometimes, and those times are gracious times when God is dealing with the soul, and convincing it of sin.

"No sinner! I will wound, disclose, But Thy forgiveness interposed, And mercy's healing balm poured in." If any one in this state desires to relieve his conscience, and come to the minister at any time, like physician he is open to such calls at all times, and must in pity take those first who are in the greatest pain of mind. He must restore those who are weary and wearied with their sins in a spirit of meekness and charity by "the Word of God," which is "the power of God unto salvation." And in doing this there must be no restriction placed by any one, bishop or layman, on the right of resort to the priest by the penitent at his own will, and in any suitable place, but, on the contrary, he must be encouraged to come, though never urged or compelled to come. This latter rejoiced in Calvin recommended, Knox practised, and the whole Church, except a bishop or two and some vestrymen, allow.

The Roman rule of confession is practically compulsory, enforced, and involuntary, for without sacraments there can be no salvation, and, practically, sacraments are denied without confession. This Roman rule is objected to by the Anglican fathers, and by us priests of this Church is repudiated.

A voluntary resort to a minister of reconciliation to obtain the comfortable assurance of God's mercy, and those are "comfortable words" which contain it, is no more censurable than resort to a legal adviser for counsel or guidance, or to a physician for relief and remedies.

Usually in all three cases the same sins confessed to the priest appear as diseases to the physician or as crimes and offenses to the lawyer. While it is true and even notorious that among a certain class of medical and legal practitioners the most shocking crimes, connivances with guilt, compromises of felonies, frauds and immoralities are planned and executed, there can be no doubt that in general the highest principle and the noblest sense of honor regulate every detail of such intercourse.

There is, therefore, no need of restrictions being placed on the confidential intercourse of priest and people, which only base minds suspect, and which goes on every day in purity with physicians in respect of disease, and with lawyers in respect of crimes and immoralities in their clients. Such restrictions as a wise prudence will suggest are placed by us upon those who resort to us and do not come unattended. And here let me say I know physicians who are balked and baffled in their treatment of disease, where young men and young women die of consumption, or become nervous wrecks on their parents' hands, and these physicians have told me that it was not the physician with medicine, but the priest with moral and religious restraints, who was needed for their cure or conservation in body and soul.

Again, the question of the celibacy of the clergy is dependent upon an arbitrary rule of the Roman Church. Many Popes were married men. Pope Hormisdas was married, and left a son Silverius, who was Pope after him. Pope Adrian IV, the only Englishman who was ever Pope (Nicolas Breakspeare), was son of a married priest, and Pope Clement IV (A. D. 1265) was married, had children, his wife died, and he was made Pope, and no one either. [Churton's, Ear. Eng. Ch., p. 37.]

The State law in Italy now allows that there is nothing in the condition of a priest to forbid his marrying, and it is desirable and inevitable that in time the greater part of them will. The compulsory enforcement of celibacy, as a rule, is one thing and the voluntary adoption of it by priests or laymen or women is another. There are thousands who think it good for the present distress, and daily men or women are devoting themselves to this life. We have already connected with our Church a company of celibate priests, and there are say forty such companies of different orders in England. Those that are here have the sanction of the bishops of Illinois, Massachusetts, and New York, and their celibacy being voluntary, the Church does not interfere with any one who seeks in that way freedom for a religious, or as the sects are beginning to call it, "the higher life." So we are building up brotherhoods and sisterhoods who take up the cross and leave all to wait on their Lord in the person of his weaker brethren.

Thus, while the Italian priests will, under protection of the State, gradually cast off obedience to the law of the Church about celibacy which has been forced on them, many here are freely embracing it. The Greek Church compels her parish priests to marry, but selects her bishops from among the celibates. So we shall soon have the like mixed and free condition, every one in his vocation and ministry truly serving the Lord according to his gifts and grace.

I have thus noted some of the points on which we Catholics are drawing nearer and nearer to each other. There are many and grave grounds of difference which bar intimate association with Rome at present, or until the reforming party within her do that for her which we are trying to do for the Protestant Episcopal Church. The good work of promoting unity, peace, and concord is engaging men of peace and piety who labor for its restitution, and the reunion of Christendom, not on an ecclesiastical muddle like the Evangelical Alliance, but on the statements of the truly Catholic Church.

Let us, without losing our love to the truth, with uniform intention seek for unity of spirit, first the reunion of Christendom afterwards by the removal of old errors, prejudices, and walls of partition set up by unreasonable, unscriptural, or wicked men. Hitherto the Greek Church and the Anglican have been like brothers and sons of one mother who do not even speak. Until lately the Anglican Protestant has denounced everything Roman because it was Roman, and the Roman has denounced everything Anglican because it was Protestant, and neither of them for any other good reason often. After the opposition and abuse Rome has received, there is, or will be among Protestants, a reaction in her favor, as is seen by the conversions she makes. Men educated in the narrowest Protestantism, and in the strictest sects of Puritanism, have gone over to Rome. Most of these converts were evangelical Protestants who went through many phases, and were High Churchmen by the way, before they joined Rome. They were obliged to cross our territory before they went over, but they started originally with the Protestant idea that Rome alone is the Catholic Church, and they passed over, or never stumbled on the truth that our Church is the true Catholic Church for English-speaking people. These men who went will tell you they found Protestants ignorant of the claims of the Catholic (not Roman) Church on all Christians, that they found Protestants misrepresenting those claims when they noticed them, and treating the gravest questions of faith and morals even with controversial bitterness and partisan unfairness, instead of Christian candor and honesty.

As a general rule Catholics do not go to Rome unless under extraordinary pressure, and when they go are not happy there, as many of them have returned. But when denied the privileges which Catholic Christians love and our Church allows, even her enemies begin to judge, they go where they can worship the Lord every Lord's day in the Eucharist, instead of listening to the inapt talk of preachers who, denying the sacraments of Christ's sacramental force, transfer that force to sermons, which they assert to be the word of God, which Protestants believe to be so for a time, but which, when their eyes are opened, they see to be only the crude tradition of a sect, or the ignorance, the folly, or the jargon of tongues in strife. The revival of Catholic truth, which the Prayer Book is a manifestation of, is one of the miracles of our day. Christian people have told me they have not read their Prayer Book over again from us, and never saw in it until they came here the real measure of its worth, or the real significance of its words. When even bishops ignore what is on its pages, and what forty commentators, bishops, and preachers, and laymen have found there, it is no wonder if bumber men are deceived. The preaching and teaching of these doctrines make the hearers Catholics. [In the articles there are 750 negative and 150 positive propositions.]

We Catholics teach positive truth; Protestants teach negative truth. We say this is so; the Protestants say that is not so. A proper understanding of infallible supremacy, the doctrine of purgatory, and the worship of the Virgin Mary are the real obstacles to union. It is not possible intelligently to unite with a Church teaching them. It is the duty of the English and American Church to retain, publish, and practise openly, fully, and honestly everything Catholic she holds and has. Already the Greek Church holds us as a sister. The Roman Church has two manners of people struggling in her. The late Council showed their strength. It is not doubtful that the Catholic party will triumph, and the Roman will fall. The Anglican Church has only to maintain her Catholic protests against Rome and to abandon those Puritanical denials of truth which sectarian Protestantism has implicated her in, and in less than a generation, at our present rate of progress, the Greek, the Roman, and the Anglican Church will be seen advancing with outstretched hands to reconciliation, and our own Church throughout the world will be the honored instrument of reunion, on the basis of "the faith once delivered to the saints," which she upholds.

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